



DR CHEN TU PROTOCOL TRAPEZIECTOMY & SUSPENSIONPLASTY

Post-operative instructions



Protect the reconstruction while restoring safe thumb movement and function in stages.

FIRST 10–14 DAYS PROTECT IN THE BACKSLAB

- Keep the plaster backslab and dressings clean, dry and in place until review.
- Elevate the hand for the first 48 hours and whenever swollen.
- Move all fingers regularly; make a loose fist without squeezing.
- Bend and straighten the exposed thumb tip gently if comfortable.
- Use the hand only for very light tasks.

Every 1–2 hours while awake:
5–10 gentle finger reps

Move—do not load
Do not force

IMPORTANT

- × No pinch, grip or thumb loading
 - × Do not remove/alter the backslab
 - × No pressure through the operated hand
- Keep bandage dry



Open fingers

Gentle fist

Elevate hand

2–6 WEEKS THERMOPLASTIC SPLINT AND MOTION

- At review, the backslab is removed; the wound and dissolving sutures are checked.
- Hand therapy fits a forearm-based thermoplastic thumb-spica splint.
- Wear the splint to complete 6 weeks total protection; remove only as your therapist advises.
- Begin gentle active thumb and wrist motion—no strengthening.



Thumb splint

Gentle bend

Thumb away

The splint protects the suspension while it heals. Avoid forceful opposition, passive stretching, key pinch and gripping.

6+ WEEKS WEAN SPLINT AND REBUILD FUNCTION

- At 6 weeks, wean the splint if comfortable and cleared by your therapist.
- Start light daily tasks out of the splint: buttons, cutlery and a light cup.
- Begin gentle grip/pinch strengthening when advised—usually from 6–8 weeks.
- Delay strong key pinch, jars, secateurs and heavy lifting until about 10–12 weeks.
- Build load gradually—pain is your guide.



Buttons

Light mug

Putty later

Swelling, stiffness and reduced pinch strength are common for months. Recovery often continues for 6–12 months.

TYPICAL MILESTONES

1

FIRST 10–14 DAYS

- Backslab clean and dry.
- Elevate; move fingers and thumb tip.
- No pinch, grip or lifting.

2

2–6 WEEKS

- Wound reviewed; dissolving sutures checked.
- Thermoplastic thumb-spica splint.
- Gentle therapist-directed motion.
- Splint protection totals 6 weeks.

3

AROUND 6 WEEKS

- Wean splint when cleared.
- Drive when out of the splint and able to control the wheel safely.
- Light tasks; begin gentle strengthening.

4

10–12+ WEEKS

- Strong key/power pinch and jar opening.
- Heavier lifting, gym, gardening and manual work gradually.

KEY POINTS TO REMEMBER



Backslab dry to review



Move fingers from day 1



Splint protection for 6 weeks



Heavy pinch 10–12+ weeks

CONTACT CLINIC / THERAPIST IF:

- backslab is wet/tight/cracked or the splint rubs
- redness, discharge or increasing pain
- fingers become numb, cold, pale or blue
- thumb movement or function is not progressing